



Shade #4

DC Comics, July 1997

by Robinson & Zulli

Another fine HaGefT/Grundy scan



FROM THE PAGES OF **STARMAN**TM

THE

THE SHADE

4

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JAMES
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HARVEST'S END



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Shade: Finale

1997

Craig

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James Robinson
Artist
Michael Zulli
Colorist
Pat Garrahy
Letterer
Chris Eliopoulos
Editor
Chuck Kim

HERE
WE ARE.

This began with a letter.

My address is not common knowledge so the correspondence had traveled far on a weaving tuck. It had been mailed to Jay Garrick.

Who had mailed it on to Ted Knight.

Who had given it to his son Jack.

Jack had sat on the letter for some time while he battled the Royal Flush Gang, and then enjoyed a manic week of partying.

Finally he remembered and gave it to me. (Crumpled and stained with I don't want to think what.)

Dear Sir.

I'm not much of a writer so I'll be brief. My husband is Craig Ludlow. One of those who hate you. Only he doesn't. He's a good man, a farmer and a father. He has no ill-will towards you. I knew about the old hate with you but figured it would die with Craig, him not caring, and being the last of the English Ludlows you encountered long ago.

But then his brother Gary turned up. We thought he was dead. He was no good and always in trouble. Word had it he'd died in a knife fight in Denver.

Now he's reappeared, revealing that he'd faked his own death to avoid some men he owed money to.

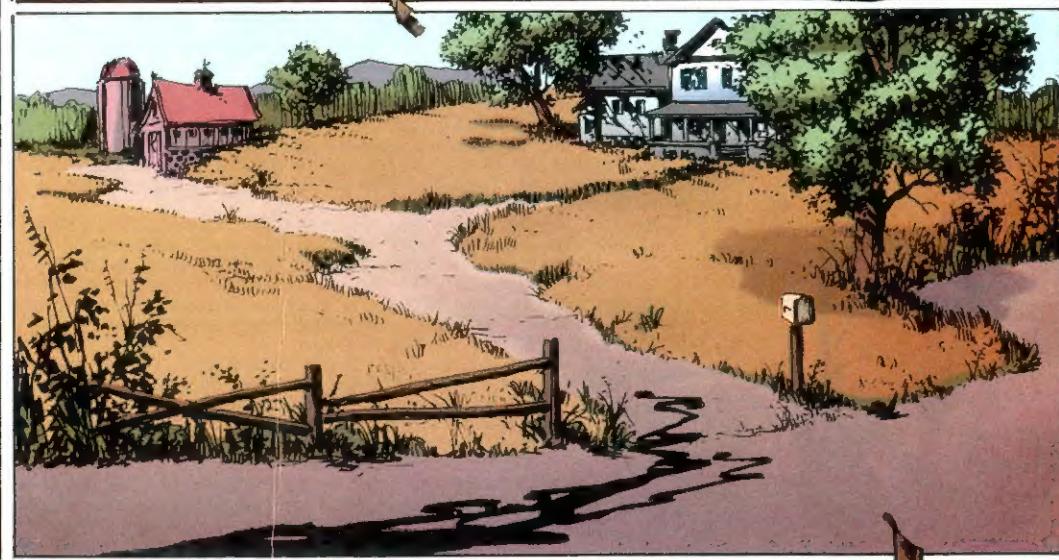
Yes, he's back and his Ludlow hate came with him. He wants to kill you. My husband is smart and gentle. Yet when he's with Gary he changes. The flicker of Ludlow craziness when your name comes up. I've begun to see it on his face.

I take a risk by writing to you, but I hope that by you coming to us, before they can formulate some scheme that will get them both killed, you might reason some sense into my husband's head.

We live in the town of Ludlow. This by coincidence more than design.

My address and that of my brother-in-law, Gary, are both below. I await your arrival with anticipation.

Yours,
Blair Ludlow



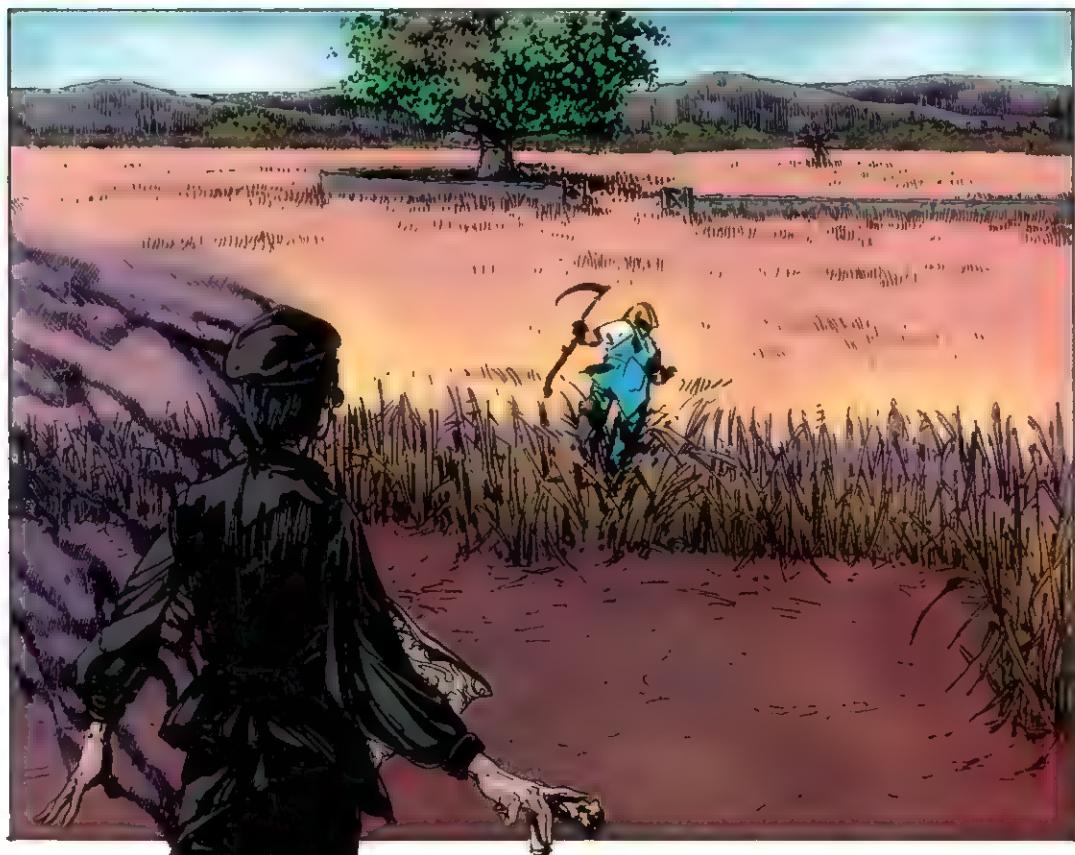








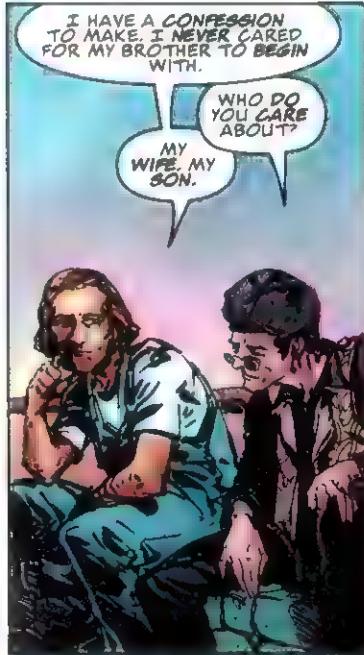












IT'S QUIET OUT HERE. I LIKE THAT.

SO DO I. I LIKE TO THINK. IT'S EASY WHEN I'M WORKING

I'M WRITING A BOOK. I COME OUT HERE, AND ALL THE PROBLEMS... THE PROBLEMS WITH BANK LOANS... THE FIELDS NOT GIVING ME THE YIELD THEY OUGHT TO... EVEN THE WOE THAT COMES WITH BEING A HUSBAND AND FATHER. IT ALL GOES AND I CAN WORK ON MY IDEAS.

WHAT KIND OF BOOK?

IT'S A MYSTERY. IT'S ABOUT A FARMER WHO BUYS THE FIELD OF A NEIGHBOR WHO TOOK ILL AND DIED TO MAKE HIS ACREAGE BIGGER.

YES, I'M WITH YOU SO FAR

ANYWAY, HE'S HOEING AND PLOWING AND THEN ONE DAY HE COMES UPON A GIRL'S BONES. HE CALLS THE COPS AND THEY SAY THEY CAN'T IDENTIFY THE BONES. THEY'RE TOO OLD. THE FACE HAS BEEN BASHED IN TOO MUCH.

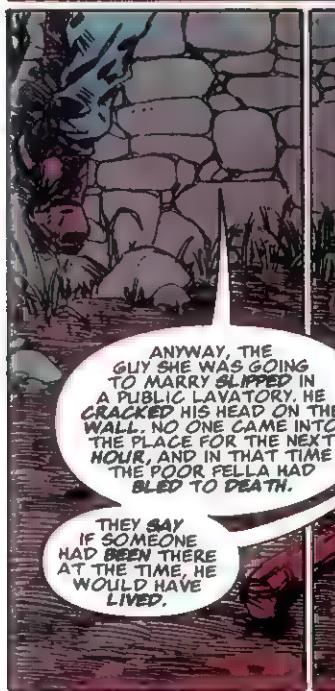
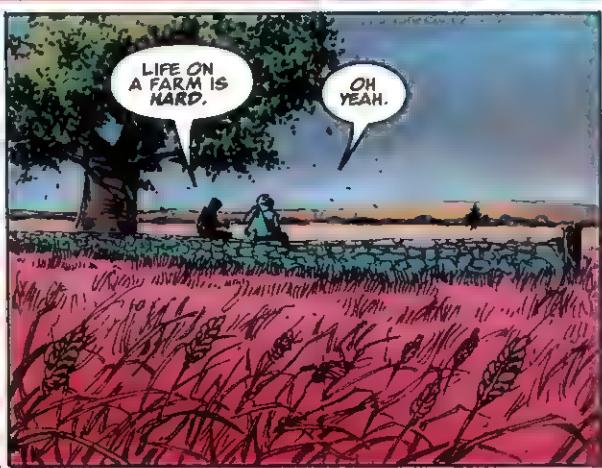
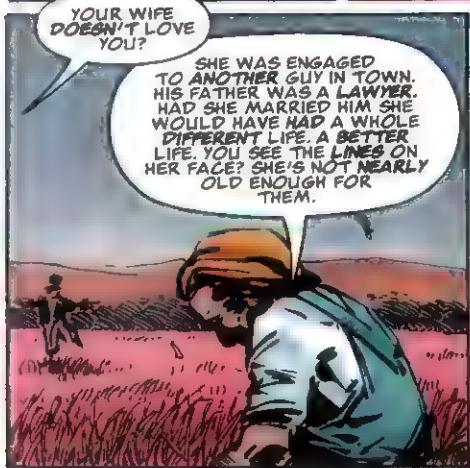
BUT THE FARMER DECIDES TO DO SOME INVESTIGATING, AND HE STARTS TO UNCOVER THIS CRIME COMMITTED LONG AGO. AND IT'S A BIG SECRET THAT THE TOWN ELDERS HAVE KNOWN ABOUT FOR TWO CENTURIES AND THEY WANT TO PREVENT THE SCANDAL. THEY DECIDE TO KILL THE FARMER, AND SUDDENLY HIM AND HIS WIFE ARE IN DANGER.

HAVE YOU WRITTEN MUCH OF IT?

FOUR CHAPTERS. I WORK SLOWLY. NOT 'CAUSE I'M CAREFUL, BUT 'CAUSE AS YOU CAN HEAR FROM HOW I SPEAK, I'M NOT VERY WELL LEARNED. I WANT THIS WRITING TO BE PROPER, EVEN IF MY SPEAKING ISN'T.

I'M IMPRESSED.
YOU'RE CONDESCENDING.

NO. NOT AT ALL.



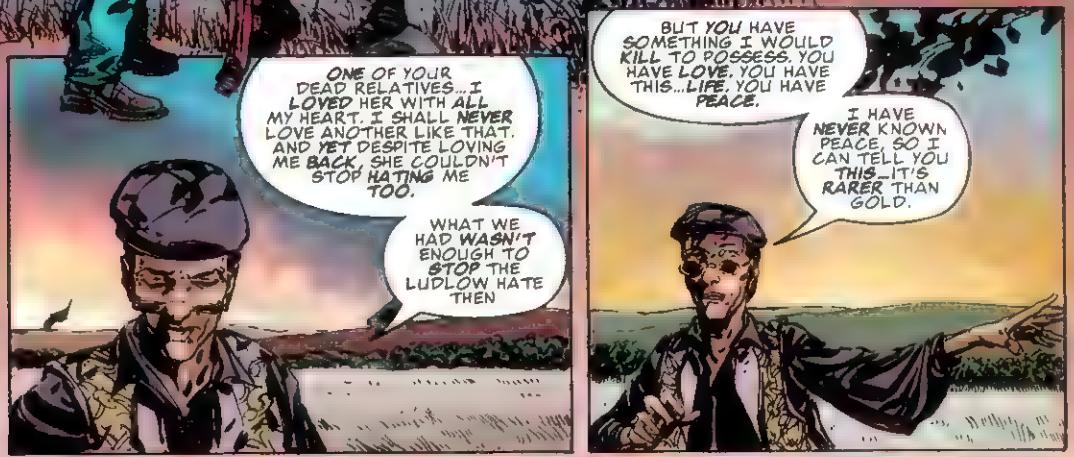
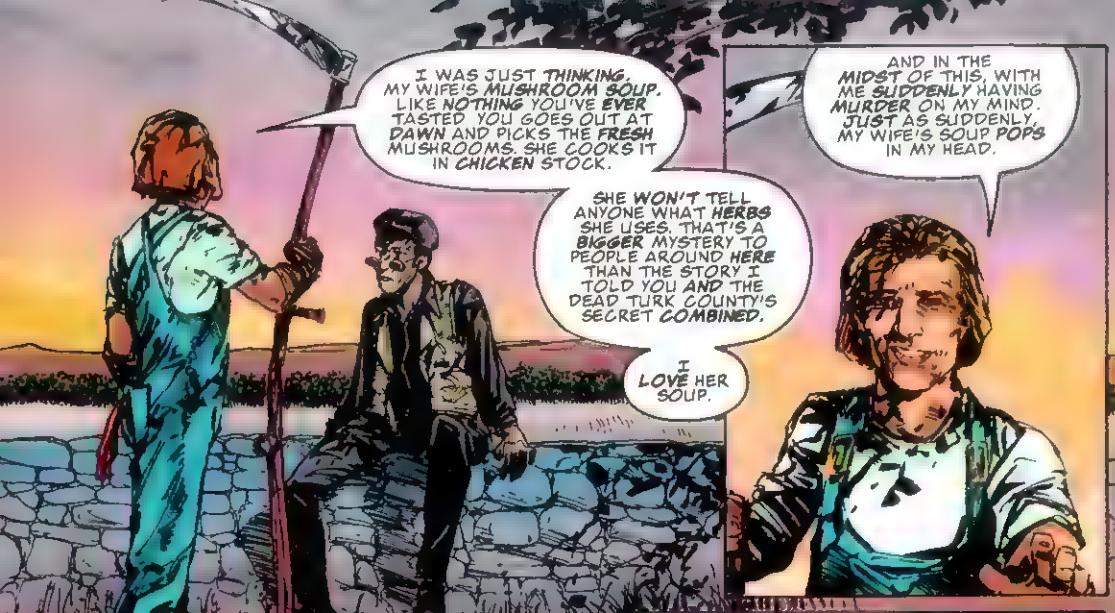
WOULD IT SURPRISE YOU TO KNOW SHE BEGGED FOR YOUR LIFE A LITTLE WHILE AGO? THAT SHE TOLD ME SHE LOVED YOU? WOULD IT SURPRISE YOU TO KNOW SHE SUMMONED ME HERE, IN FEAR THAT YOU'D FOLLOW IN YOUR BROTHER'S MADNESS?

SHE LOVES YOU, AND YOU'RE AN IDIOT FOR NOT SEEING IT.

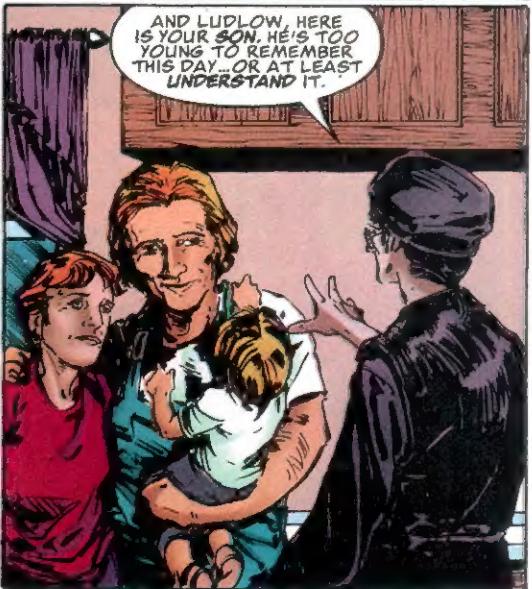
YOUR STORY, IT REMINDS ME OF SOMETHING. AN OLD FRIEND OF MINE, BRIAN SAVAGE, HE WAS ON HIS WAY TO TAKE OVER AS SHERIFF OF OPAL CITY. THE COUNTY ADJOINING IT IS CALLED TURK COUNTY NOWADAYS, BUT THEN IT WAS CALLED DEAD TURK COUNTY.











I may yet face
the wrath of Craig
Ludlow.

Or in a generation I'll
face his son. Or his grandson
a generation after that.

I hope not. I hope it's
over. That there aren't any
more Ludlows hiding in
faraway corners plotting
and hating.

I suppose the only
way I'll know is when
the next attack happens.
Or doesn't.

It's a
beautiful
evening.

The End.

FROM THE SHADE'S JOURNAL

A voice in my head. No, behind me. I spun around. It was the Devil. He wore a fur coat.

"You are kin to me, are you not? Are you not a sprite demon? True, you are not as versed in Hell's ways, but you are darker in your practices than many who swim with glee in Hell's soupy mire."

"I am a sprite demon?" I asked. "I'm not sure I know the term, nor its meaning."

"One who is tainted with my venom." He smiled. "One who could gain entry to Hell. One who could rise and rise within the ranks of my legion."

"Oh, I see."

"Do, you? Do you indeed? Do you see how the sweet life you've had might be sweeter and fuller still in so many wonderful ways?" He paused for dramatic effect. He smiled again. "Be my agent on Earth. Be that and I will give you freedom from your chill predicament. I will give you this man you seek. I will give you warm climes and brandied drinks."

I felt snow fall upon my face. "You have many agents on Earth already, I shouldn't wonder," I said.

"I have a few."

"Some would say a few too many."

"And some might say too few. It depends what side of the fence you're sitting on."

I coughed and staggered slightly. "I've always enjoyed sitting astride that fence. He that takes sides should expect to have to take issue with another on the other side of that fence before he is done. And he who takes issue oft as not is forced to take arms. And where, then? You are dead or that other." Now it was I who paused for effect. "No, I don't take sides."

The Devil frowned. "But you are not a good man. Your acts of malice many would call worthy of me."

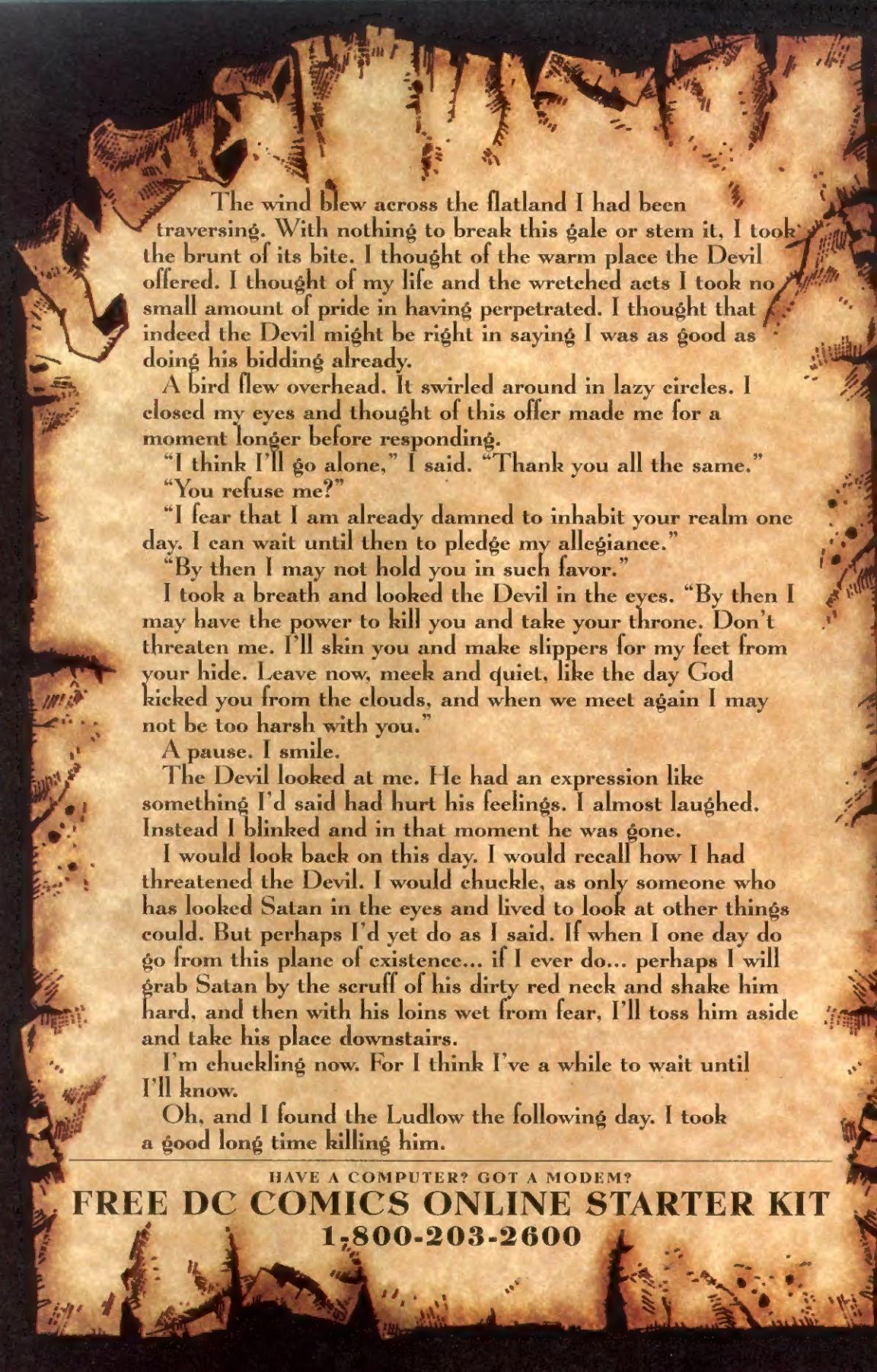
"I'm flattered."

"Then you'll join me."

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The wind blew across the flatland I had been traversing. With nothing to break this gale or stem it, I took the brunt of its bite. I thought of the warm place the Devil offered. I thought of my life and the wretched acts I took no small amount of pride in having perpetrated. I thought that indeed the Devil might be right in saying I was as good as doing his bidding already.

A bird flew overhead. It swirled around in lazy circles. I closed my eyes and thought of this offer made me for a moment longer before responding.

"I think I'll go alone," I said. "Thank you all the same."
"You refuse me?"

"I fear that I am already damned to inhabit your realm one day. I can wait until then to pledge my allegiance."

"By then I may not hold you in such favor."

I took a breath and looked the Devil in the eyes. "By then I may have the power to kill you and take your throne. Don't threaten me. I'll skin you and make slippers for my feet from your hide. Leave now, meek and quiet, like the day God kicked you from the clouds, and when we meet again I may not be too harsh with you."

A pause. I smile.

The Devil looked at me. He had an expression like something I'd said had hurt his feelings. I almost laughed. Instead I blinked and in that moment he was gone.

I would look back on this day. I would recall how I had threatened the Devil. I would chuckle, as only someone who has looked Satan in the eyes and lived to look at other things could. But perhaps I'd yet do as I said. If when I one day do go from this plane of existence... if I ever do... perhaps I will grab Satan by the scruff of his dirty red neck and shake him hard, and then with his loins wet from fear, I'll toss him aside and take his place downstairs.

I'm chuckling now. For I think I've a while to wait until I'll know.

Oh, and I found the Ludlow the following day. I took a good long time killing him.

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